

'Fostering' Understanding of TBI

By: Paige Eaton

Patti Foster was the much-anticipated guest speaker at the Pilot Club of Quitman's February 20th meeting. One of the Pilot Club's primary missions is to encourage brain health and safety. As part of that focus, they sponsor, serve and interact with individuals that attend Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Camps.

Patti's colorful and descriptive firsthand account of her own TBI, lent the Pilots' a deeper understanding of the challenges the people they serve at TBI camp experience. Beyond Patti's account of her injury and her fight to overcome, her message encouraged and inspired, as relayed by these Quitman Pilots.

Sharon Brooks said of Patti's message, "It was surprising and stunning that after the horrific injuries Patti endured, she was so normal, so outgoing and so vivacious! And, we were all intrigued by everything she told us. It was miraculous that she could even survive the injury she had. She made you realize that you can get through things that you don't think that you can go through. Her perseverance was outstanding. It was about how you should enjoy where you are. Be in the here and now. Appreciate the people around you." Brooks said Patti illustrated

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Meet Patti Foster, She's MAD-Now.

By: Chuck Roy

Patti Foster is MAD. And she has been MAD for a good while. But she wasn't always MAD.

Since 1990, Patti's focus had been radio. She was the morning show host at a radio station in South Bend, Indiana. Before that, she fulfilled a variety of positions for a Christian music station in Tyler, Texas. Patti's radio career provided opportunities that led her into becoming a full-time speaker. She traveled nationwide speaking to church and corporate organizations of all sizes.

When I met with her in a conference room at Wood County Electric, on one of our many rainy afternoons recently, I immediately understood that MAD was a life choice and not an emotional condition. To Patti, and a lot of people who hear her message, it is an acronym for Make a Difference, Now!

Patti Foster had a life altering event that directed her to being MAD-Now 100% of the time.

On a typically Texas hot summer afternoon, Patti and three friends were returning home from church where the four of them had attended their regular bible study meeting. It was June 18, 2002.

The late model Tahoe was stopped at a stop sign on Texas Highway 69 in Northeast Texas when Patti unbuckled from her seat, just behind the driver, and reached to adjust some floral decorations that they had created during the afternoon. She feared that the flowers had shifted during the trip. They had to be perfect. They were intended for a church service the next day.

No one saw the car-transport tractor trailer approach the intersection from behind the Tahoe. No



one expected that the truck would not recognize the stop sign or the motionless Tahoe ahead. No one could imagine that the 18-wheeler would impact the ladies' SUV at full highway speed.

And no person could have anticipated the immediate terror, trauma, panic and pain that filled the cab of the vehicle as it was being crushed under the weight and momentum of the truck. Passengers of three other vehicles at the intersection stop sign witnessed an almost war-like catastrophe.

Patti was ejected from the Tahoe like "a piece of laundry," said one eyewitness. Her body tumbled, rolled and slid across the rough, hot blacktop roadbed and came to a stop as a heap of bloody clothes. "Almost unrecognizable as a human form," said another witness to the horror. If not for her colorful Capri slacks, it looked like a pile of raspberry stained wash waiting for laundry day.

Paramedics quickly arrived and when Patti's body was examined there was no life energy observed. A

white blanket was placed over her and she was left to lie on the blistering hot asphalt that appeared to be her deathbed. The medical professionals rushed away to attend to and triage the other passengers still trapped in the remnants of the vehicle.

Traffic was stopped in all four directions. One truck driver positioned his vehicle sideways in the road to protect Patti from the possibility of unaware oncoming traffic. A dozen passengers left their own vehicles to attend to Patti as a prayer circle formed around her. Holding hands, strangers prayed openly and tearfully for God to receive His child.

In all of the chaos, one could have easily missed the muted gurgling sound from Patti. A sign of life! The paramedics were quickly summoned and the "pile of laundry" was loaded into a helicopter and



rushed to the lifesaving skills of surgeons and the mandate from her Creator.

Many surgeries saved Patti's life and a happily ending story could be finished here. But it was actually only the preamble to Patti's life story. Patti endured six weeks in a coma; one of her friends in the Tahoe that day eventually succumbed to her injuries; several surgeries, medications, and a constant prayer vigil became the intermission of her story.

The frontal lobes of the human brain controls almost all of the body's

voluntary reflex mechanisms. They are involved in motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgement, impulse control, and social behavior.

The frontal lobe of Patti's brain was so severely damaged in the impact that she had to relearn the most rudimentary motions. Learning to walk, talk, and so many of the daily activities

that most of us take for granted had to be remastered for Patti.

She had to learn how to breathe for herself. How to blink her eyes, to recognize sounds as words and words as thoughts, and to translate those thoughts into motions. To learn the alphabet, numbers, colors, and to write as an adult would be difficult, but she also had to learn how to control her muscles in her arm, hand, and fingers to even lift the pencil.

To focus her eyes, to make

again being able to recognize and remember the people she loved, Patti had to relearn everything.

And now, as her 15 year restoration process continues, Patti's heartbeat is to inspire and bring hope to others through her speaking, writing, and living her life moment by moment.

Patti currently serves as Vice President of Hope after Brain Injury and was selected to the Texas Brain Injury Advisory Council (TBIAC) and is a Committee Chairperson. Patti is also a member of the North Texas TBI Model System Advisory Council, serves on the BIAA-Texas Division Strategic Planning Committee, and travels often as a speaker for Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

She travels the state, the country, and the world as an advocate that there is life after apparent death. That the human spirit knows no boundaries and that a God-given life will find a way to persevere even after horrific trauma. Patti Foster is a remarkable human being and a true inspiration to all who know her.

She has had to learn to live again and she is MAD-Now all of the time. ♦

the letters of her name, to not get frustrated when she failed and to process all of the unfamiliar noises were challenges she faced daily.

Her faith in her Creator supported her during the next chapter of her life. From how to eat to once

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that beautifully as she guided the Pilots through an exercise where they expressed appreciation for other individuals in the club. That exercise, Brooks said, helped strengthen the club by bolstering relationships.

Teresa Dunn said, "I was very impressed with her tenacity and her faith in God. She has such a positive attitude despite all she has been through. And her faith just increased through her journey." Teresa also said she was amazed at how Patti had been so diligent in training herself to remember, and how to process things. As one example, Teresa said that Patti listened to pre-meeting conversations and was able to recall all of those along with the names of the new Pilots she had just met, and then she sprinkled that into her speech and into conversations.

JoAnn Parten, was equally impressed, saying, "Patti was truly inspirational with her message about what love and faith can do. She had to relearn how to write and speak and everything else. It took months of her life. And, her memories did not come back right away. When she woke up from the coma she didn't even know who her Mom was, and they had to tell her! It's unbelievable and remarkable how she has been able to recover and now be able to tell her story so eloquently. It's amazing how the brain can recover. Her message was a perfect one for our club to hear, and for any group who wants to be inspired." ♦